

The Land of Broken Promises

A Stirring Story
of the Mexican
Revolution

By DANE COOLIDGE
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"The Fighting Fish"
"The Fighting Fish"
"The Fighting Fish"
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SYNOPSIS.

Bud Hooker and Phil De Lancy are forced, owing to a revolution in Mexico, to give up their mining claims and return to the United States. In the border town of Guadalupe Bud meets Henry Kruger, a wealthy miner, who makes him a proposition to return to Mexico to acquire title to a very rich mine which Kruger had blown up when he found he had been cheated out of the title by one Aragon. The Mexican subsequently spent a large sum in an unsuccessful attempt to relocate the vein and then allowed the mine, known as the Eagle Tail, to be located. They engage the services of Cruz Mendez, who has been friendly to Kruger, to acquire the title for them and get a permit to do preliminary work. Aragon protests and accuses them of jumping his claim. Bud discovers that matrimonial entanglements make it impossible for Mendez to secure a valid title to the land. Phil, who has become interested in Aragon's daughter, Gracia, decides to turn Mexican and get the title in his own name.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

Undoubtedly, in his own way, he was in love—but he would never admit it, that he knew, too. So he sank down on the blankets and swore harshly, while De Lancy stared at him in unguessed surprise.

"Well, then," he went on, taking Bud's answer for granted, "what're you making such a row about? Can't I go to a dance, with a girl without you jumping down my throat?"

"Why, sure you can!" rumbled Bud, now hot with a new indignation; "but after getting me to go into this deal against my will and swearing me to some damn-fool pledge, the first thing you do is to make friends with Aragon and then make love to his daughter. Is that your idea of helping things along?"

"Dye think that's the way a partner ought to act? No, I tell you, it is not!"

"Aw, Bud," protested De Lancy plaintively, "what's the matter with you? Be reasonable, old man; I never meant to hurt your feelings!"

"Hurt my feelings!" echoed Hooker scornfully. "Huh, what are we down here for, anyway—a Sunday school picnic? My feelings are nothing, and they can wait; but we're sitting on a mine that's worth a million dollars and—"

"and it ain't ours, either—and when you throw in with old Aragon and go to making love to his daughter you know you're not doing right! That's all there is to it—you're doing me and Kruger dirt!"

"Well, Bud," said De Lancy with mock gravity, "if that's the way you feel about it I won't do it any more!"

"I wish you wouldn't," breathed Bud, raising his head from his hands; "it sure wears me out, Phil, worrying about it."

"Well, then, I won't do it," protested Phil sincerely. "So that's settled—now who's going to turn Mexican citizen?"

"Suit yourself," said Bud listlessly. "I'll match you for it!" proposed De Lancy, diving into his pocket for money.

"Don't need to," responded Bud; "you can do what you please."

"No, I'll match you!" persisted Phil. "That was the agreement—whenever



She Gave Me Her Hand and Away We Went.

It was an even break we'd let the money talk. Here's your quarter—and if I match you I'll become the Mexican citizen. All set? Let 'er go!"

He flipped the coin into the air and caught it in his hand.

"Heads!" he called, without looking at it. "What you got?"

"Heads!" answered Bud, and Phil chuckled his money into the air again and laughed as it dropped into his palm.

"Heads she is again!" he cried, showing the Mexican eagle; "I never did see the time when I couldn't match you, anyway. So now, old socks, you can keep right on being a Texan, and hating Mexicans like horny toads, and I'll denounce the Eagle Tail the minute the time is up. And I won't go near the Aragon outfit unless you're with me—is that a go? All right, shake hands on it, pard! I wouldn't quarrel with you for anything!"

"Aw, that's all right," mumbled Bud, rising and holding out his hand. "I knowed you didn't mean nothing." He sat down again after that and gazed drearily out the door.

"Say, Bud," began Phil, his eyes sparkling with amusement, "I've got something to tell you about that dance last night. If I didn't put the crusher on Mr. Felix Luna and Manuel del Rey! Wow! I sure wished you were there to see me do it!"

"This Felix Luna is the son of an old sugar planter down from the hot country somewhere. He got run out by the revolution and now he's up here trying to make a winning with Gracia Aragon—uniting two noble families, and all that junk. Well, sir, of all the

conceited, swelled-up little squirts you ever saw in your life he's the limit, and yet the old man kind of favors him."

"But this Manuel del Rey is the captain of the rurales around here and a genuine Mexican fire-eater—all buckskin and fierce mustaches, and smells like chili peppers and garlic—and the two of 'em were having it back and forth as to who got the next dance with Gracia."

"Well, you know how it is at a Mexican dance—everybody is supposed to be introduced to everybody else—and when I saw those two young turkey-cocks talking with their hands and eyebrows and everybody else backing off, I stepped in close and looked at the girl."

"And she's some girl, too, believe me! The biggest brown eyes you ever saw in your life, a complexion like cream, and hair—well, there never was such hair! She was fanning herself real slow, and in the language of the fan that means, 'This don't interest me a bit!' So, just to show her I was wise, I pulled out my handkerchief and dropped it on the floor, and when she saw me she stopped and began to count the ribs in her fan. That was my cue—it meant she wanted to speak with me—so I stepped up and said:

"Excuse me, senorita, but while the gentlemen talk—and if the senora, your mother, will permit—perhaps we can enjoy a dance."

"And say, Bud, you should have seen the way she rose to it. The girl is a sport, believe me, and the idea of those two novices chewing the rag while she sat out the dance didn't appeal to her at all. So she gave me her hand and away we went, with all the old ladies talking behind their fans and Manuel del Rey blowing up like a volcano in a bunch of carambas or worse. Gee, it was great, and she could dance like a queen."

"But here's the interesting part of it—what do you think she asked me, after we'd had our little laugh? Well, you don't need to get so grouchy about it—she asked about you!"

"Aw!"

"Yes, she did! So you see what you got for throwing her down!"

"What did she ask?"

"Well, she asked—here he stopped and laughed—"she asked if you were a cowboy!"

"No!" cried Bud, pleased in spite of himself; "what does she know about cowboys?"

"Oh, she's wise!" declared Phil; "she's been to school twice in Los Angeles and seen the wild west show. Yes, sir, she's just like an American girl and speaks English perfectly. She told me she didn't like the Mexican men—they were too stuck on themselves—and say, Bud, when I told her you were a genuine Texas cowboy, what do you think she said?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Bud, smiling broadly in anticipation; "what did she say?"

"She said she'd like to know you!"

"She did not!" came back Bud with sudden spirit.

Then he laughed the thought away, a great burden seemed to be lifted from his heart, and he found himself happy again.

CHAPTER X.

To an American, accustomed to getting things done first and talking about it afterward, there is nothing so subtly irritating as the old-world formalism, the polite evasiveness of the Mexicans; and yet, at times, they can speak to the point with the best of us.

For sixty days Don Cipriano Aragon had smiled and smiled and then, suddenly, as the last day of their mining permit passed and there was no record of a denouncement by Cruz Mendez, he appeared at the Eagle Tail mine with a pistol in his belt and a triumphant sneer on his lips.

Behind him rode four Mexicans, fully armed, and they made no reply to De Lancy's polite "Buenos dias!"

"Take your poor things," burst out Aragon, pointing contemptuously at their tent and beds, "and your low, pelado Mexican—and go! This mine no longer stands in the name of Cruz Mendez, and I want it for myself! No, not a word!" he cried, as De Lancy opened his mouth to explain. "Nothing! Only go!"

"No, senor," said Hooker, dropping his hand to his six-shooter which hung low by his leg and stepping forward, "we will not go!"

"What?" stormed Aragon, "you—"

"Be careful there!" warned Bud, suddenly fixing his eyes on one of the four retainers. "If you touch that gun I'll kill you!"

There was a pause, in which the Mexicans sat frozen to their saddles, and then De Lancy broke the silence.

"You must not think, Senor Aragon," he began, speaking with a certain bitterness, "that you can carry your point like this. My friend here is a Texan, and if your men stir he will kill them. But there is a law in this country for every man—what is it that you want?"

"I want this mining claim," shouted Aragon, "that you have so unjustly taken from me through that scoundrel Mendez! And I want you to step aside, so that I can set up my monuments and take possession of it!"

"The Senor Aragon has not been to the agents mineral today," suggested De Lancy murely. "If he had taken the trouble he would not—"

"Enough!" cried Aragon, still trying to carry it off cavalierly; "I sent my servant to the mining agent yesterday and he reported that the permit had lapsed."

"If he had taken the pains to find out for new permits, however," returned De Lancy, "he would have found that one has been issued to me."

I am how a Mexican citizen, like yourself."

"You!" screamed Aragon, his eyes bulging with astonishment; and then, finding himself tricked, he turned suddenly upon one of his retainers and struck him with his whip.

"Son of a goat!" he stormed. "Pig! Is this the way you obey my orders?"

But though he raved and scolded, he had gone too far, and there was no putting the blame on his servant. In his desire to humiliate the hated gringos he had thrown down all his guards, and even De Lancy saw all too clearly what his intentions in the matter had been.

"Spare your cursing, Senor Aragon," he said, "and after this," he added, "you can save your pretty words, too—for somebody else. We shall remain here and hold our property."

"Ha! You Americans!" exclaimed Aragon, as he chewed bitterly on his defeat. "You will rob us of everything—even our government. So you are a Mexican citizen, eh? You must value this barren mine very highly to give up the protection of your government. But perhaps you are acquainted with a man named Kruger?" he sneered.

"He would sell his honor any time to defraud a Mexican of his rights, and I doubt not it was he who sent you here. Yes, I have known it from the first—but I will fool him yet!"

"So you are a Mexican citizen, Senor De Lancy? Bien, then you shall pay the full price of your citizenship. Before our law you are now no more than that poor pelado, Mendez. You cannot appeal now to your consul at Guadalupe—you are only a Mexican! Very well!"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled slyly.

"No," retorted De Lancy angrily; "you are right—I cannot appeal to my government! But let me tell you something, Senor Mexicano! An American needs no government to protect him—he has his gun, and that is enough!"

"Yes," added Bud, who had caught the drift of the last, "and he has his friends, too; don't forget that!" He strode over toward Aragon and menaced him with a threatening finger.

"If anything happens to my friend," he hissed, "you will have me to whip! And now, senor," he added, speaking in the idiom of the country, "go with God—and do not come back!"

"Pah!" spat back Aragon, his hate for the pushing foreigner showing in every glance; "I will beat you yet! And I pray God that the full half of my cattle—so long as they get you two!"

"Very well," nodded Bud as Aragon and his men turned away, "but be careful you do not send any!"

"Good!" he continued, smiling grimly at the pallid Phil; "now we got him where we want him—in the open. And I'll just remember them four palanos he had with him—they're his handy men, the boys with nerve—and don't never let one of 'em catch you out after dark."

De Lancy sat down on a rock and wiped his face.

"Heavens, Bud," he groaned, "I never would have believed it of him—I thought he was on the square. But just goes to prove the old saying—every Mexican has got a streak of yellow in him somewhere. All you've got to do is to trust him long enough and you'll find it out. Well, we're hep to Mr. Aragon, all right!"

"I never seen one of these polite, palavering Mexicans yet," observed Bud sagely, "that wasn't crooked. And this fellow Aragon is mean, to boot. But that's a game," he added, "that two can play at. I don't know how you feel, Phil, but we been kinder creeping and slipping around so long that I'm all cramped up inside. Never suffered more in my life than the last sixty days—being polite to that damn Mexican. Now it's our turn. Are you game?"

"Count me in!" cried De Lancy, rising from his rock. "What's the play?"

"Well, we'll go into town pretty soon," grinned Bud, "and if I run across old Aragon, or any one of those four bad Mexicans, I'm going to make a show. And as for that big brindle dog of his—well, he's sure going to get roped and drug if he don't mend his ways. Come on, let's ketch up our horses and go in for a little time!"

"I'll go you!" agreed Phil with enthusiasm, and half an hour later, each on his favorite horse, they were clattering down the canyon. At the turn of the trail, where it swung into the Aragon lane, Bud took down his rope and smiled in anticipation.

"You go on ahead," he said, shaking out his loop, "and I'll try to put the catgut on Brindle."

"Off like a flash!" answered De Lancy, and, putting the spurs to his fiery bay, he went dashing down the street, scattering chickens and hogs in all directions. Behind came Bud, rolling jocularly in his saddle, and as the dogs rushed out after his partner he twirled his loop once and laid it skillfully across the big brindle's back. But roping dogs is a difficult task at best, and Bud was out of practice. The sudden blow struck Brindle to the ground and the loop came away unfiled. The Texan laughed, shifting in his saddle.

"Come again!" commented Bud, leaning aside as he coiled his rope, and as the womenfolk and idlers came rushing to see what had happened he turned Copper Bottom in his tracks and came back like a streak of light.

"Look out, you ugly man's dog!" he shouted, whirling his rope as he rode; and then, amid a chorus of indignant protests, he chased the yelping Brindle down the lane and through a hole in the fence. Then, with no harm done, he rode back up the street, smiling amiably and looking for more dogs to rope.

In the door of the store stood Aragon, pale with fury, but Bud appeared

not to see him. His eyes were turned rather toward the house where, on the edge of the veranda, Gracia Aragon and her mother stood staring at his antics.

"Good morning to you, ladies!" he saluted, taking off his sombrero with a flourish; "lovely weather, ain't it?" And with his tongue in his cheek and a roguish glance at Aragon, who was struck dumb by this last effrontery, he went rollicking after his partner, sending back a series of joyous yips.

"Now that sure does me good," he confided to Phil, as they rode down between cottonwoods and struck into the muddy creek. "No sense in it, but it gets something out of my system that has kept me from feeling glad. Did you see me bowing to the ladies? Some class to that bow—no? You want to look out—I got my eye on that gal, and I'm sure a hard one to head. Only thing is, I wouldn't like the old man for a father-in-law the way matters stand between us now."

He laughed boisterously at this witicism, and the little Mexican children, playing among the willows, crouched and lay quiet, like rabbits. Along the sides of the rocky hills, where the peons had their mud-and-rock houses, mothers came anxiously to open doors; and as they jogged along up the river the Chinese gardeners, working in each separate nook and eddy of the storm-washed creek-bed, stopped grubbing to gaze at them inquiringly.

"Wonder what's the matter with them chinks?" observed Bud, when his happiness had ceased to effervesce; "they sit up like a village of prairie dogs! Whole country seems to be on the rubber neck. Must be something doing."

"That's right," agreed Phil; "did you notice how those peons scattered when I rode down the street? Maybe there's some new insurgents through. But say—let's stop."

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